

Overview Of Theology And Science Against Water Baptism Virtually By Virtual Reality Church

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Abstract One of the churches that performs services by utilizing the development of information technology is the virtual reality church pastored by DJ Soto. All services are carried out virtually. In its service information, this church offers water baptism sacrament services which are carried out virtually. This research aims to conduct a theological and scientific study of virtual water baptism so that it becomes input for believers and God's church. This study used a descriptive qualitative approach, in which the primary data was obtained by means of literature review. The results of the study show that water baptism carried out by the virtual reality church has no biblical basis, so believers and God's church must reject this baptism.

Keywords: Baptism; Water Baptism; Virtual Baptism

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, the development of virtual reality has increased sharply, this is in line with the corona virus disease (Covid-19) pandemic that has hit the whole world. The Covid-19 pandemic has automatically limited people's movements in both urban and rural areas (*Pemerintah Gencarkan Upaya Penanganan Lonjakan Kasus COVID-19 – Sehat Negeriku*, n.d.). Government authorities limit community activities outside the home (Gitiryako, 2021; Muhandari & Ilham, 2021). This impasse makes people's creativity and ideas develop. Activities outside the home are limited but communication and community activities are still going well. One solution to these restrictions is the widespread use of virtual reality. Virtual reality is an information technology that allows a user or users to communicate and interact with other people in a virtual world simulated by a computer, so that the person feels they are in a place together or in an environment simulated by the computer. Virtual reality makes its users feel the sensation of the virtual world as if it were real. In other words, virtual reality is a process of erasing the real world around humans, then making the user feel led into a virtual world that has absolutely no contact with the real world (Machover & Tice, 2014).

Virtual reality technology has been widely applied in various sectors including medicine, aviation, education, architecture, military, tourism (virtual touring), entertainment, games and also in religious activities. Virtual reality environments generally provide a visual experience, which is displayed on a computer screen or through a stereoscopic viewer, but some

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simulations include additional sensory information, such as sound through speakers or headphones (Andika, 2019).

One of the churches that utilizes virtual reality technology in its ministry is the virtual reality church (VR Church) led by Pastor DJ. Soto also offers virtual water baptism services (Shinta, 2018). Like a conventional church, the virtual reality church also serves the congregation through religious services, cell groups, teaching the word, and also serving the sacraments through virtual media such as virtual baptism services. The question arises, is virtual water baptism biblical? How is science responding to virtual water baptism? How should believers respond to the virtual sacrament of water baptism?

Several previous studies related to the use of water baptism and the use of virtual reality technology in church services and specifically in the service of the sacrament of water baptism are: Otieli Harefa in *Pasca: Theology and Christian Education of Journal* entitled *The Theological Implications of Water Baptism for Salvation is a sacred experience in the church and is a must as a member of the church and that the sacrament of water baptism is a public acknowledgment or declaration that he has repented leaving the old way of life and declaring his faith in Christ so that he belongs to the living God* (Harefa, 2020). Hasibuan et.al. in the *Visio Dei Journal* entitled “*The Concept of Baptism in Acts and Its Evaluation of Virtual Baptism*. Hasibuan highlighted virtual baptisms where the baptismal minister was not present but in the baptismal font but via video call communication. In her presentation, Hasibuan stated that the baptism did not meet the biblical requirements due to the absence of the godfather (priest) at the baptismal font and the non-fulfillment of the koinonia element in the baptismal service (Hasibuan et al., 2022). Based on previous research, there is still a gap where there is no overall view of baptism being carried out virtually as was done by the VR Church and there is no scientific view of virtual baptism. Thus this problem is still very relevant to be studied academically to produce a thorough and comprehensive description.

This study aims to: (1) describe the biblical view of water baptism; (2) how science perceives the virtual administration of the sacrament of water baptism; (3) as material for consideration for believers in responding to virtual water baptism.

METHOD

The discussion in this article uses qualitative research methods with an exploratory study approach to primary sources. Qualitative research is research that intends to understand concepts, behaviors, perceptions, motivations, actions and so on, holistically and by means of descriptions in the form of words and language in a natural context by utilizing available data

(Moleong, 2006). Zaluchu further explained that the descriptive research method (descriptive re-search) is research that aims to accurately describe research results and variables in the research, so that a comprehensive presentation of information about these variables is obtained based on predetermined categories (Zaluchu, 2020). So in this study, the researcher will present primary data obtained through exegesis of biblical texts about baptism, as well as literature studies. With library research, the writer reviews various textbooks, journal articles, dictionaries and other documents related to the topic of discussion. The results of this study are used to describe the biblical concept of water baptism; scientific views of virtual water baptism; and as material for consideration for believers in responding to virtual water baptism.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A Bible Review of Water Baptism

Baptism comes from the word baptist. According to the Big Indonesian Dictionary, baptism is the use of water for religious purification, especially as the sacrament of accepting someone into Christianity; baptism (Meaning of Baptism - Big Indonesian Dictionary (KBBI) Online, nd) . In the Bible, the word baptism is taken from the word *tevilah*, this word comes from the Hebrew verb *taval*, meaning to be immersed or immersed (2 Kings 5:14). In the New Testament the word *baptis* is translated from the word *baptizo* (*baptizw*) which means to dip something and take it out again. This word is used 77 times as found in Matt. 3: 6,11,13,14,16; 28:19 (Hasan, 2014a, 2014b). Sabdono said that baptism refers to the life of someone who takes a commitment to enter into a new way or lifestyle by leaving the old lifestyle (Sabdono, 2017). Baptism is an act of faith for believers to leave the old way of life and put on a new lifestyle which is symbolized by giving one's self to be baptized.

Conditions for Receiving Baptism

1. Repent

As explained above that baptism is a willingness to take a commitment to change, so baptism must start from the repentance of someone who will receive baptism. As the narrative conveyed by Luke in the story of the apostles when Peter preached in the upper room after the event of the descent of the Holy Spirit. In Acts. 2:37,38. When they heard this their hearts were deeply moved, and they asked Peter and the other apostles, "What shall we do, brethren?" Peter answered them: "Repent and let each one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. When they heard the gospel message conveyed by Peter their hearts were deeply moved. The word moved is translated from the word *katenuvghesan*, is a form of the third person plural passive indicative

aoris verb which is defined as stabbing; causing uncomfortable feelings such as anxiety, regret, etc.; feeling uneasy and regretful (Hasan, 2014a, 2014b). The listeners were worried and regretted their actions and way of life. The anxiety was then followed by the question, what should we do? A question that was right in response to the gospel message delivered by the apostles. That response was repentance and self-giving to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ (Hasibuan et al., 2022) .

Repent. The word used by Peter is metanoesate (Metanohvsate) from the root metanoeco (metanoevw) which means to repent (to regret). In the New Living Translation it is translated as Each of you must repent of your sins and turn to God (each of you must repent of your sins and turn to God) (*BibleGateway - Keyword Search: Repent*, n.d.). There are the same absolute requirements for “repentance”—that is, a change of heart and will—the same outward ritual as a symbol of sanctification, the same promise of forgiveness that this change involves (Ellicott, 2015). Repent, this word denotes a change of mind, and here includes the acceptance of the Bible as the exact result of the revolution of the mind that they experienced at that time (Jamieson et al., 2012).

Repentance implies sorrow for sins committed against God, along with the intention to renounce them. It is not just fear of the consequences of sin or God's wrath in hell. It is the view of sin, as evil itself that leads the mind to hate it and renounce it. The fact that it is evil, and that God hates it, is reason enough for those who are truly converted to hate it and leave it. False repentance fears the consequences of sin; true repentance is afraid of sin itself. The people who heard Peter's gospel message were just shocked; they feared the wrath, and especially the wrath of the Messiah. They don't really feel sin as crime, but only fear punishment. Peter did not see this warning as true repentance. Such belief in sin will soon be lost, unless their repentance is thorough and complete. Therefore, he told them to repent, to turn from sin, to mourn it as an evil and bitter thing, and to express their sorrow in an appropriate way (Albert, 2018).

This repentance covers three perspectives: (1) Recognizing that oneself is a sinner. True repentance begins with self-awareness as a sinner. When we repent we realize that we are full of mistakes. This perspective proves the formation of a transformation of the mind, a transformation of thoughts about sin, God, and oneself. Guilt is now recognized as personal negligence, God is recognized as the One who legally demands the facts, and oneself as polluted and powerless to resolve sins. The Bible mentions this aspect of repentance as understanding sin (Rom. 3:20; cf. vv . 42:5,6; Ps. 51:5; Lk. 15:17,18; Rom. 1:32). Repentance also includes a transformation of thoughts about Christ (Thiessen, 2010). This sinful

consciousness is not just a feeling of guilt but an awareness by means of an intellect that understands exactly and definitely if we have committed sinful acts. (2) Regretting all wrong actions. In true repentance there is an act of heartfelt remorse for all the wrong things we have ever done. This assessment proves a transformation of feelings. Feeling pain over sin and wanting forgiveness are elements of repentance. There is a feeling of deep regret (Thiessen, 2010). If a person realizes his sins before God by himself it shakes the depths of his heart and deeply regrets because of all his sins because of the understanding of the wages of sin, namely death (Rom. 6:23). (3) There is a desire not to repeat sinful acts. The desire here is the desire to turn from their sins and the desire to receive God's grace in Jesus and also the desire to live for God (Marantika, 2002). Making a decision not to sink into sinful acts again and this requires a firm and radical decision or obsession to step away from sin. True repentance has all three of the above elements.

2. Give Yourself

In several Bible narratives about baptism, there is always a call to “give yourself”, including: (a) when John the Baptist appeared in the desert, John said, “repent and be baptized” (Mark 1:4); (b) the event of Pentecost when Peter delivered the gospel message, in response to the news, Peter said, repent and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins” (Acts 2:38); (c) the narrative of Philip's ministry in Samaria also notes that as their response to the gospel message conveyed by Philip, they gave themselves to be baptized, both men and women (Acts 8:12); (d) the narrative of Philip's ministry to an Ethiopian who was a eunuch, prince and chief of the treasury of Sri Candake, queen of Ethiopia also implies the meaning of the word giving oneself to be baptized (Acts 8:26-39).

Giving yourself is an important phrase in the event of baptism. The phrase self-giving implies that someone who receives baptism is based on deep regret about how bad the sins were and the consequences they caused. Those sins kept him separated from God and unable to solve them on his own. In full awareness, the person comes to God asking for forgiveness for his sins which is indicated by one of the willingness to accept water baptism. So the phrase giving oneself implies that the person who wants to receive the sacrament of baptism can give careful consideration to the decision he makes. Thus this phrase contains the meaning that infants and children are not allowed to receive the sacrament of baptism because: (1) infants and children have not been able to give careful consideration to their decision to believe in Jesus and repent as the first requirement in the sacrament of baptism; (2) babies and children cannot give themselves but are brought up by their parents. As for the Bible verse that calls

out, “let the children come to me, don't hinder them, for people like that belong to the kingdom of God (Mark 10:14) not in the context of baptism but in a different context.

3. Done Directly and Using Water Media

The Bible narrative explains that water baptism is performed directly by the people who are to be baptized. They gave themselves to be baptized by the apostles. Their existence cannot be represented by other parties or other elements. At the event of Pentecost, when Peter preached Luke noted that there were people who accepted Peter's words – people who believed in the gospel message conveyed by Peter, there were approximately three thousand souls (Acts 2:41), each of them gave themselves to be baptized by the apostles. Even though they were in very large numbers, Luke did not report that their baptism was represented by several people or represented by other elements. Baptism is performed directly by the baptized.

It is almost certain that all water baptisms must use water as the medium. The baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch can provide a very graphic picture. Luke reports that both Philip and the eunuch –both of them– went down into the water, and Philip baptized him (Acts 8:38). In the original *θαηέβεζαλ ἀκθόηεζνη εἰο ηὸ ὕδσξ* they both went down into the water. The word *θαηέβεζαλ* actually already shows the plural subject of Philip and the eunuch (meaning them), but Luke emphasizes it with a word which means "both", then added the next phrase which says that it was Philip and the eunuch who came down to in water.

Luke's report is a strong foundation that: (baptization was performed directly; (2) baptism was performed using water as a medium; (3) the baptized and the baptist were in the same water, Philip did not give directions for baptism from land but together in in water. The correct baptism uses water as the medium and is performed directly by the baptized and the baptist. This is in line with what Sitanggang said that the baptist and the baptized must enter the pool of water together (Sitanggang, 2020). Kuswanto also said in his article, that the role of the baptismal minister (baptizer) in carrying out the “washing” is carried out directly (Kuswanto, 2020), which means that two parties are directly involved in the baptism process.

A Scientific View of Virtual Baptism

As explained above, baptism begins with acceptance of the gospel message that requires repentance, acceptance is marked by giving oneself to be baptized, and baptism is carried out directly. However, the Virtual Reality Church, which is pastored by Pastor DJ. Soto (Shinta, 2018), the process of baptism is represented by an avatar and baptism is carried out virtually (Arceno, 2020) on the grounds that baptism is only a symbol of leaving an old life and coming to a new life (Shinta, 2018). The statement made by DJ. The soup is a misleading statement and degrades the meaning of biblical baptism. The Bible narrative never conveys that baptism

is only a symbol of leaving one's old life and putting on a new life. In many Bible narratives, the meaning is always implied that baptism is an important event in the life of a believer where the believer makes a public confession of his repentance, thus this important event cannot be replaced by technology. This is in line with Alfonso Mendoza's statement, technology is indeed useful for facilitating the outreach of many people, but technology cannot replace important events in the lives of believers.

The presence of a person in every meeting at VR Church is represented by an avatar like other virtual reality technologies. In terms of science, the avatar is not a complete person, it can even be said that the avatar is not a person. According to Allport a complete person is a mature person, namely a person who is not controlled by bitter experiences and conflicts that occurred in the past (Schult, 2011). This person is pushed forward by a vision and a vision that unifies his personality and carries him through ever-increasing problems and challenges. Mature personality criteria are: expanding sense of self, warm relationships with others, emotional security, realistic perception, and having skills and abilities to carry out tasks. There are several reasons why an avatar can't be called a person, including:

Have Independence

Whole person can act alone without the influence and interference of others. Husna stated that a complete person has independence, meaning as a person who does not depend on other people in expressing himself, whatever form it takes (Hisaba, 2022). Immanuel Kant further stated that the human person is the value contained within him or his dignity, which is "derived from the human ability to be independent, able to make decisions and determine their own goals" (Eliasaputra, 2021). Paul Enss further states that it is called a person if it has "self-awareness (self-consciousness) and self-confidence (self-determination) that enable humans to make choices, elevating them above the animal or other material world (Enss, 2019). Based on this explanation, the researcher defines personal as someone who can make decisions based on considerations to carry out actions or activities independently without being dependent or driven by other people.

Immersion

The essence of virtual reality is immersion. It is the ability to immerse computer users in computer-generated experiences, such as active participants, not passive spectators, of immersive and interactive experiences of human physiology and psychology (Arceno, 2020). There are three levels in immersion, including: (1) Mental immersion, virtual reality technology is able to make its users feel as if they are in the real world, however it should be noted that mental avatars are certainly not the same as personal mentality in feeling the

environment in which they are present. (2) Physical immersion, virtual reality technology will provide an environment that is created to the physical user. (3) Mentally immersed, giving the user the sensation of being immersed in the environment generated by virtual reality (Selvi et al., 2021). However, virtual reality has a negative impact, namely causing cybersickness. Cybersickness is a disorder of eye strain accompanied by dizziness and psychological disturbances, namely being carried away in a pseudo atmosphere even though the user is already in the real world (Andika, 2019).

Based on the description above, avatars cannot be classified as personal because avatars cannot perform actions independently outside of actions taken by computer users. Avatars cannot provide independent considerations like human beings in general. Even though virtual reality can provide users with an experience as if they were in a real situation, there is actually a difference in quality in terms of the experience.

Virtual Water Baptism Evaluation

As explained above, baptism is not only a symbol of repentance but a response to the gospel message conveyed. When someone believes in the gospel message conveyed, it is continued by giving himself directly to be baptized. So baptism is a public announcement that the person believes in Jesus as Lord and personal savior. The Bible narrative describes that everyone who responds to the gospel message gives himself to be baptized. The baptism process involves the person of the believer and is not represented by any object.

Virtual baptisms carried out by the virtual reality church do not involve the individual believers directly but are represented by the avatar. The view of science explains that avatars are not personal because avatars have no independence. Avatars are driven by computer users. Thus the virtual baptism carried out by the virtual reality church has no biblical basis. Even more firmly, the researchers stated that baptisms performed virtually by the virtual reality church were wrong and unbiblical. Therefore, Christians must firmly reject this kind of invitation in cyberspace. It is undeniable that virtual reality can be used as an effective media for preaching the gospel because it is not limited by space and time, but the service of the sacrament of water baptism which is a sacred service is not allowed to be carried out virtually.

CONCLUSION

Based on the above study, it can be concluded that water baptism performed by a virtual reality church does not meet the requirements outlined in the Bible, thus water baptism is invalid. Believers must reject the water baptism service offered by the virtual reality church. This research is an input for believers in responding to similar things from church institutions

that offer virtual water baptism sacrament services. Information technology can facilitate many things, but not everything has to be done with information technology.

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